

'Eastex is the skeleton in the Time Inc. closet'

Post Staff Correspondent

NEW YORK — Three years ago, a Texas-based writer for a national weekly magazine received an assignment from an editor in New York to write a story.

He spent a couple of weeks researching it, interviewing those connected with it and touring the subject area. He wrote the story and sent it to New York, and a few weeks later, he was paid for his labors.

But the story never was printed. It was killed by high-rups at the magazine.

The magazine was Sports Illustrated. The story was about the Big Thicket area of East Texas — a source of a bitter dispute between conservationists and the timber and paper industries.

The story, the writer confirmed in a recent interview, was sympathetic to the Big Thicket and to conservationists' efforts to preserve as much as possible of what is left of what once was three million acres of virgin hardwood timber.

The reason the story was killed, according to reliable sources, is that it focused unwanted attention on the activities of Eastex Inc., a pulp and paperboard manufacturing operation near Silsbee.

Eastex is owned wholly by Time Inc., which publishes Sports Illustrated, Time, Fortune and Money. Until late last year, it also published Life.

Eastex was the largest single money producer in the Time Inc. stable during its last fiscal year, having yielded \$100 million in revenues and \$8 million in earnings. Those profits helped keep the firm's sagging magazines afloat financially.

In addition to being a major money maker for Time Inc., Eastex also is a major polluter of the water and air

of East Texas. Its officials have stringently opposed efforts to create a Big Thicket National Park or, if one is to be created, to limit severely its size and location.

As one former senior editor from Life magazine put it: "Eastex is the SKELETON IN THE TIME INC. CLOSET."

Even at a time when Time and Life were attacking other major polluters in print for failure to clean up the air and water which they soiled, corporate officials at Time Inc.'s posh Rockefeller Center offices here were going to extremes to keep any mention of Eastex Inc. out of print — especially in their own publications.

The impact of Time Inc. on East Texas in general and on the Big Thicket National Park in particular is about to be increased many fold, and the firm's decisions and policies would make or break any effort to establish the park.

Time Inc. is buying the other major pulp and paperboard producer in East Texas — Temple Industries of Diboll — for \$153 million in a merger.

WHEN COMPLETED, the merger will make Time Inc. the largest single landowner in East Texas with almost 1,000,000 acres. It also will become one of the largest employers in the area.

At the moment, Eastex Inc. owns between 35 and 40 per cent of the land which conservationists say should be included in the park and preserved. Temple Industries owns about 5 per cent, but their merged holdings would make Time Inc. the largest, single landowner whose property might be taken for a national park.

Although he is prohibited by federal regulation from discussing now specific details of the merger, board chairman Andrew Heiskell left no doubt

the firm plans to continue the profit-making policies which increased the net worth of Eastex Inc. threefold from the day it was acquired.

Interviewed recently in his towering 34th floor office suite, Heiskell would say only that Time Inc., through its subsidiary, Eastex Inc., has favored establishing a Big Thicket National Park.

"We realize there is something to it," Heiskell said. "We have come out in favor of one of the proposals, but I don't recall which one."

BUT HE ADDED: "The question that isn't clear in my mind is: What is really good and necessary for the area?"

He raised the question of who would benefit most from the park — those living in the immediate area or the nation as a whole, as in the case with other national parks. He expressed doubt many persons would drive very far to see such a park with admittedly limited scenic attractions.

The board chairman pointed out also that proponents of a Big Thicket National Park cannot agree on its size or its exact location. He suggested that if six members of Congress were to propose Big Thicket legislation, there would be six sizes and six locations given with each named as "the" ones.

Heiskell stops short of agreeing with Big Thicket park critics in Texas who contend there is no such thing as the thicket and that it really is a "state of mind."

HE VIEWS IT as an "elusive" quantity: "It's a shifting target. It all depends on who is proposing what."

Legislation to create the park has ranged from the now-discredited 35,000-acre "String of Pearls" concept to an equally unrealistic 3 million-acre plan.

Although he would not com-

mit himself about the specific size of a park he favors, Heiskell said he would oppose any effort to make it 3 million acres.

"This doesn't mean that I'm not in favor of a lot of land down there being made available to the public," he quickly added.

But he does favor the swapping of whatever Time Inc. land is taken for the park in return for other federally owned lands in East Texas — a position backed by other timber interests in Texas.

HEISKELL STOUTLY defends the operations of Eastex and its record on the environment: "We are accused of despoiling the area and of cutting down all those trees... but our people down there have done a good job."

"And the Temple people are considered responsible people, too," he added. "In fact, I'm told they are better than we."

Reminded that Time Inc. was about to become the largest landowner in East Texas, Heiskell quickly noted its holdings would not be all in one parcel but would be "thousands of parcels spread all over the place. It isn't a homogeneous land."

In response to a direct question, Heiskell said Time Inc.'s board of directors has formed no specific policy about the Big Thicket National Park.

Those decisions, he indicated, will continue to be left to the managers of its Texas operations as they have in the past.

INDICATIONS ARE also that Time Inc. will not alter its unwritten policies of not drawing public attention through its own publications to the operation of its Texas subsidiaries — even though it may be criticizing other industries for polluting or criti-

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The former Life senior editor, interviewed at his home near here, told The Houston Post that a top editor of the magazine "hit the roof" when Life ran a story about the ivory-billed woodpecker a year ago.

The writer said the former editor, knew about Eastex Inc. when he went to East Texas to do a story on the hunt for the bird, which is believed extinct, "but he didn't know to what extent Eastex was involved.

"HE WAS SHOCKED at what he saw," the editor related.

One of the conclusions reached in the story was that the ivory-billed woodpecker, which Heiskell refers to as "that never-seen-bird," became extinct because its natural habitat and food supply were destroyed by clearing of the land and cutting of timber.

One of the culprits named in the story was Eastex, and it was only after considerable consultation with senior and associate editors at Life that the decision was made to leave mention of Eastex in the story. The editors also inserted a footnote identifying Eastex as a subsidiary of Time Inc., and the story was "locked" into the magazine.

THE NEXT DAY, the top editor returned from a business trip and learned of the decision.

"He told us, 'You realize, of course, that I'll now have to call Eastex and apologize,'" said the former editor.

Eastex' reaction to the call, he said, was anger coupled with the comment: "Why are you guys taking a swing at us? We all belong to the same stockholders."